



walk with Wickland Westcott

Tips on Providing Feedback

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TOP TIPS ON PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

The ability to give effective, honest feedback is a fundamental skill of management. However giving honest feedback remains something that many leaders shy away from. When you look at the data gathered within performance appraisal processes from almost any organisation, managers' ratings show a clear skew towards the positive end of whatever scale has been devised.

When it comes to giving feedback, everybody wants it and everybody knows what good looks like for them. Few people however have the confidence to be honest when this risks kick starting a chain reaction that they won't know how to control.

When giving feedback it is therefore important to concentrate on three core areas: Being clear on the Why, defining What, and explaining the How.

Let's look at these three areas in turn, starting with the **Why**...



Why...

It is essential that feedback is viewed by the giver as something that is positive and helpful. Often leaders are worried about demotivating staff by sharing feedback that will be seen as bad news. However, if people are off target the only way that this can be corrected is by taking the plunge and being honest.

There are also proven ways to ensure that feedback is landed well and these relate to the *What* and the *How*, which we will talk about next.



What...

When considering **What** to include within feedback conversations there are some clear guidelines to keep in mind. Feedback should always be:

1. **Timely** – generally speaking we would advocate a 24 hour guideline and a one week rule
2. **Specific**
3. **Constructive**
4. **Based on behaviours not attributes** - when we talk about basing feedback on specific behaviours, we are talking about raising things that people have done or said rather than jumping to conclusions about underlying characteristics.
5. **Delivered in way that the receiver can understand it**
6. **Motivated by a desire to help**

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Another useful tip when preparing to offer feedback is to check our own motivations by asking “why am I about to share this feedback?” If the answer is anything other than “because it will help the individual concerned or the organisation”, then we should revisit what we are about to say.

Now let’s consider the most important aspect of giving feedback – the **How**.



How...

The first thing to say here is that there is No Room for Sandwiches. The old good-bad-good combination only confuses people. Many victims of this approach walk away remembering the good news and forget the bad.

Secondly, Don’t Dance. We would never advocate leaders tip toe around issues with excessive small talk. If you have bad news to deliver get on with it.

Instead we recommend the following five steps:

1. Gain Permission
2. Discuss Observations
3. Discuss the Impact
4. Explore the Issue
5. Discuss and Agree Actions

WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

As well as being simple, there are three clear reasons why this model works. The first is the inclusion of the first stage: Gaining Permission. We're talking here about letting people know that you would like to share some feedback and that they are ready to receive it. The key to getting this right is to put yourself in the shoes of the receiver. It might only take 30 seconds, but when you do it right it tunes you in to the person you are talking with and provides a platform for a solid conversation.

The second reason that this model works is that the Discussion of Observations is just one stage. Often leaders over emphasise the need to prepare large volumes of evidence and examples in preparation for a feedback conversation. Focus on the key messages and ask yourself "What are the most important pieces of feedback you need to cover?", rather than looking to over-prepare an exhaustive list of every little detail.

The third reason is the emphasis on Discussing the Impact and Exploring the Issues that comes after observations have been shared. The aim within these two stages is to exchange views and develop each others' understanding of the situation. Critically, you will be allowing the participant to process the feedback you have just shared with them, giving them time and support to understand the information and work out what it means for them. The best way of doing this is to ask questions such as:

- Do you notice the impact you have when you do this?
- Have you had feedback like this before?
- What do you think are the causes of this?

Allowing enough time for these two steps in the process provides a platform for the final stage – Discussing and Agreeing Actions. If you try to move directly from sharing observations to agreeing actions then the feedback will rapidly turn into a one way conversation, with you suggesting ideas that don't really seem to be of interest.

One final tip when looking to identify actions is to remember that it is much easier for people to find ways to move towards things than away from them. Rather than concentrating on finding ways to stop things or change unhelpful behaviours, invest time in discussing how things could be and what progress might look like.

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SUMMARY

In summary, when it's your turn to share feedback keep the following seven points in mind:

1. Feedback is necessary
2. Check the content of your feedback (Is it up to date, specific, constructive)
3. Check your motivations
4. No sandwiches
5. No dancing
6. Follow the five step model
7. Focus on helping people to move towards something

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